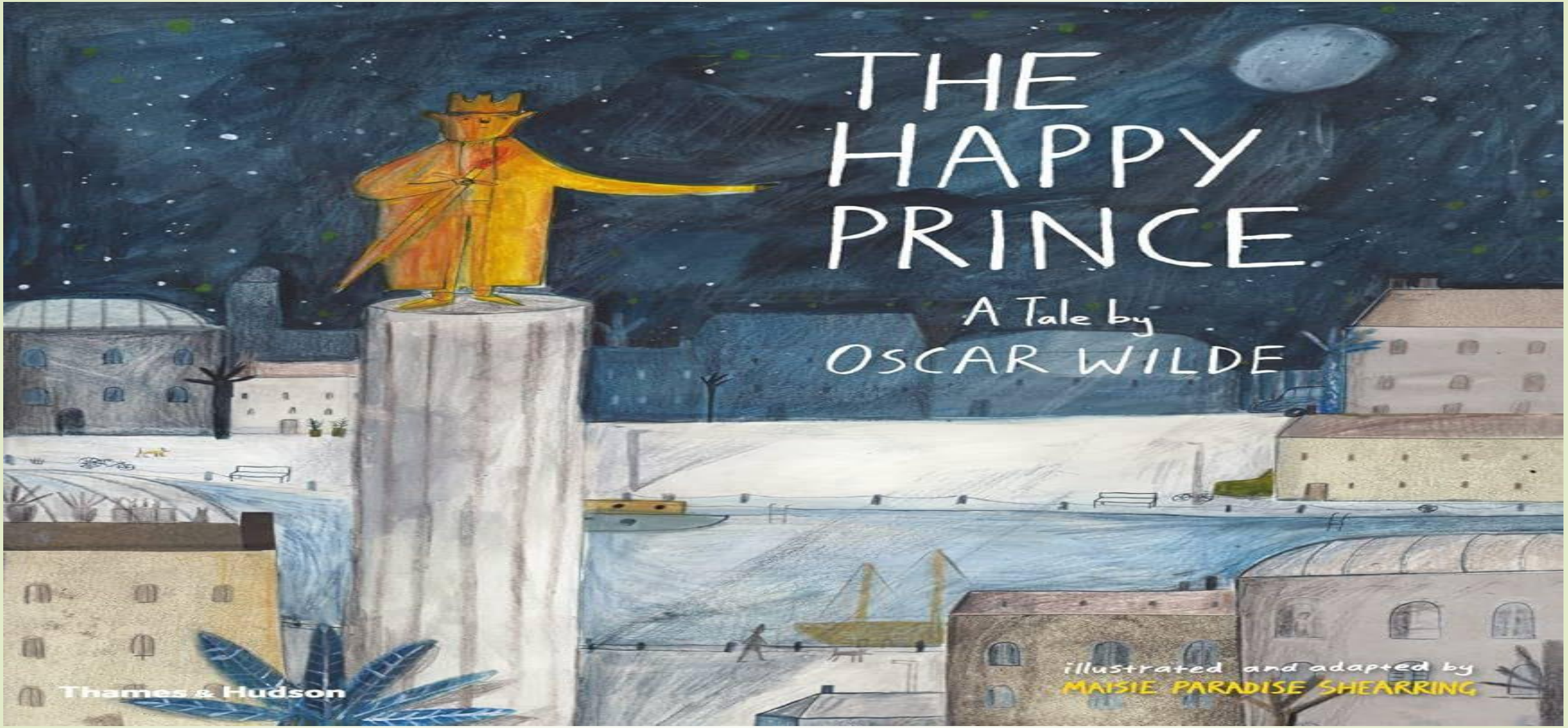


Asst. Lect. Sumaya Majeed AL-Yassiry

Oscar Wilde

Oscar Fingal O'Flahartie Wills Wilde was born in Dublin in 1856- the same year and city that produced Bernard Shaw. His father, Sir William Wilde, was an eminent surgeon; his mother also achieved some distinction as a writer and poet. At Oxford, where he came under the influence of Ruskin and Pater, he proclaimed his doctrine of "Arts for Arls‘ Sake" and attracted a good deal of attention by his eccentric dress, long hair, his poetry, and by the charm of his conversation and the brilliance of his wit. Despite his many distractions, he gained a First Class Honours Degree.

In 1882 he went on a lecture tour to America. On his arrival he announced that he was 'disappointed with the Atlantic Ocean," and when asked by the Customs official if he had anything to declare, answered, **"Nothing to declare except my genius."** His first drama, **Vera**, was produced in New York during his visit, but it is by his later plays, Lady Windermere's Fan (1892) A Woman of No Importance (1892), but above all, by the brilliantly witty The Importance of being Earnest, that Wilde is best known as a dramatist.

The Happy Prince and Other Tales was published in 1888, and though his stories are not so well known as his novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891), nevertheless they, and particularly the story that follows, have a delicacy of feeling and a beauty of language and imagination that may make them his most lasting work.

George Bernard Shaw writes, “In a certain sense Mr. Wilde is to me our only thorough playwright. He plays with everything: with wit, with philosophy, with drama, with actors and audience, with the whole theatre.”

Wilde died in Paris, France, on November 30, 1900.

THE HAPPY PRINCE by Oscar Wilde

Summary of the story

The Happy Prince is not a real, living prince. He is a statue of a prince that stands high on a tall column in the middle of the city. The statue has the soul of the dead prince inside it.

One night, a small Swallow was flying over the city. He was on his way to Egypt for the winter but had stayed behind because he fell in love with a Reed. While flying, the Swallow saw the beautiful statue of the Happy Prince and decided to rest between his feet. As he was about to sleep, a big drop of water fell on him. When he looked up, he saw that the Happy Prince’s eyes were full of tears.

The Happy Prince told the Swallow that when he was alive, he lived in a royal palace where sadness was never allowed to enter. Everyone used to call him the Happy Prince. But after he died, his statue was placed high above the city, and now he could see all the pain and suffering of the people.

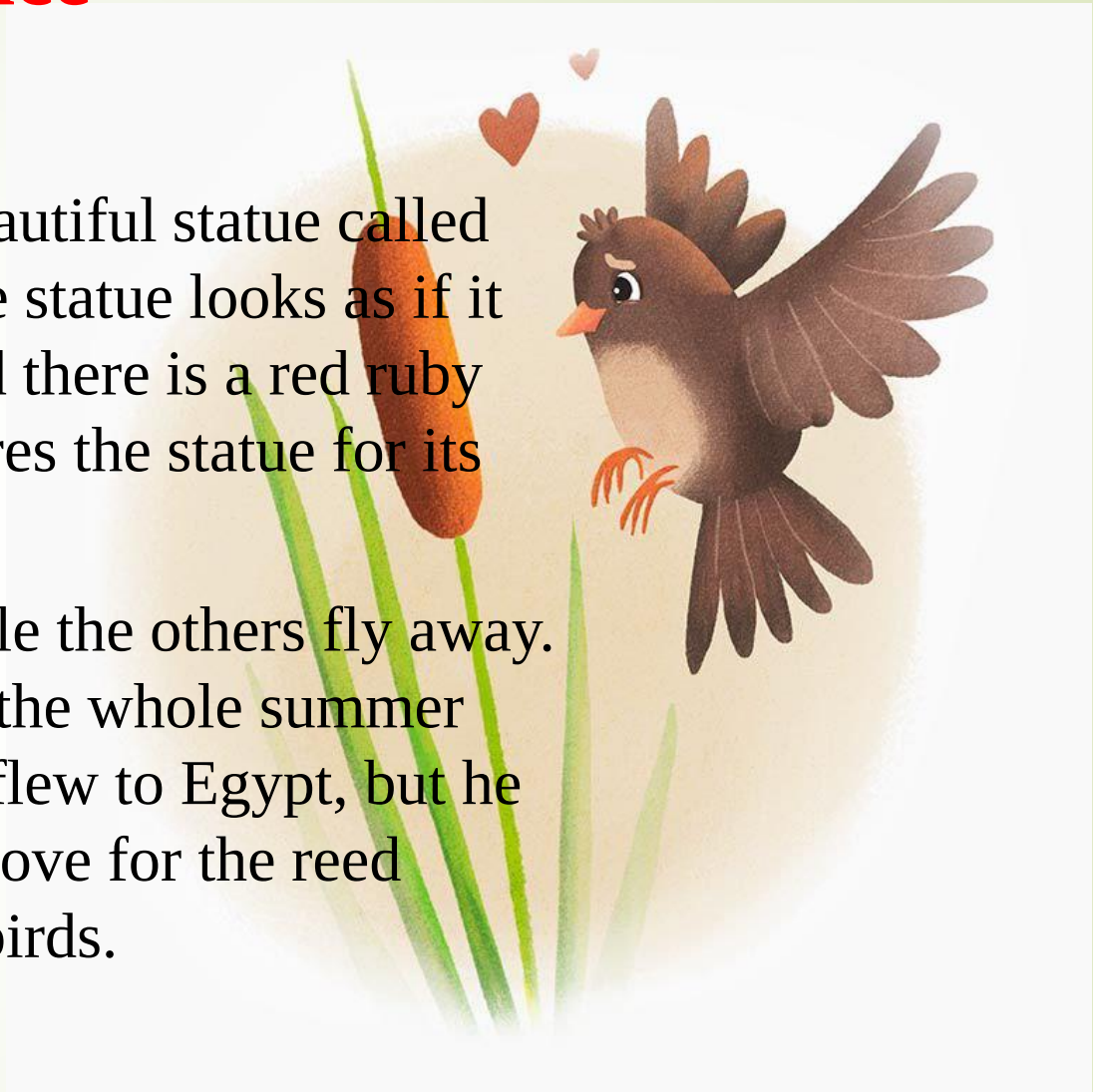
The Prince asked the Swallow to help a poor mother by taking the red ruby from his sword and giving it to her. Later, he also helped a young writer finish his play by giving him one of the sapphires from his eyes.

After that, the Happy Prince gave the little match girl another sapphire from his second eye. When the Happy Prince became completely blind, the swallow decided to stay with him in the city. The little swallow did everything the Happy Prince asked and helped many poor and hungry people. He took off the gold from the statue piece by piece until the prince looked dull and grey.

As time passed and winter arrived, the swallow said goodbye to the Happy Prince and died at his feet. The prince’s lead heart broke. The selfish Mayor told the people to take down the statue and melt it because it was no longer beautiful or useful. But the prince’s heart did not melt. God then told his angel to bring Him the two most precious things in the city. The angel took the swallow and the prince’s heart to Heaven.

The plot structure of The Happy Prince

1.Introduction



In an unnamed city in northern Europe, there is a beautiful statue called the Happy Prince. It stands high on a tall column. The statue looks as if it is made of gold. Its eyes are two bright sapphires, and there is a red ruby on the handle of its sword. Everyone in the city admires the statue for its great beauty.

As winter begins, one little swallow stays behind while the others fly away. The swallow had fallen in love with a reed and spent the whole summer with her. When autumn came, all the other swallows flew to Egypt, but he stayed because of his love. Later, he realizes that his love for the reed cannot last, so he decides to leave and join the other birds.

2.Complications:

One evening, the Swallow takes shelter under the statue of the Happy Prince. He is splashed by what he thinks at first is a raindrop but which is really a tear falling from the Happy Prince's eye. The Swallow is surprised that somebody known as the Happy Prince is crying. The Happy Prince explains that he appeared to be happy when he was alive because he knew nothing of life outside of the Palace of Sans-Souci. Only after having died did the Happy Prince learn of the realities of life for the poor. As a statue on top of a stand, the Happy Prince can see all over the city and, although his heart is now only made of lead, he feels greatly for those who are living in poverty.

He tells the Swallow of a poor seamstress whose son is suffering from a fever. He tells the bird to pluck the ruby out of the hilt of his sword and take it to the woman. The Swallow agrees to do this one good deed for the Happy Prince but insists that he will fly to Egypt the following day. The next evening, the Swallow comes to say good-bye to the Happy Prince. The statue tells the bird about a young playwright who is weak from hunger, insisting that the Swallow take one of his sapphire eyes to the young man. The Swallow reluctantly does so, again insisting that he will leave for Egypt the next day.

When the Swallow returns again to say good-bye to the statue, the Happy Prince tells him to give his other sapphire eye to a little match-girl in the square below.

3.Climax: After having done so, the Swallow promises to stay with the Happy Prince, who is now blind, forever.

4.Resolution: The Swallow flies around the city, observing the poor and reporting what he sees back to the Happy Prince. The statue tells the bird to peel off pieces of his gold leaf and to give it to those who are in need, until all of the gold is gone. At the same time, the Swallow is suffering as the weather gets suddenly colder and knows that he will soon die. The Swallow bids farewell to the Happy Prince one more time just before he dies, at which point the Happy Prince's lead heart breaks. The Mayor notices that the gold, ruby and sapphires are gone from the statue of the Happy Prince and is even more shocked to find a dead bird at the statue's feet. The statue no longer being beautiful, the Mayor orders that it be removed and melted down. However, it proves impossible to melt the Happy Prince's lead heart, which is thrown onto a garbage heap with the dead Swallow.

5.Conclusion: God asks an angel to bring Him the two most precious things in the city. The angel brings Him the dead Swallow and the Happy Prince's lead heart. God is pleased with the angel's choice and says that both the Swallow and the Happy Prince will be happy forever in Paradise.

The Characters

The Happy Prince

This character is a golden statue that can see what is going on around him, but cannot move. He was happy prince, but he cries for all the suffering that are faced by the people of this city. He asks the swallow to take pieces of him (the golden leaves of the statue, the sapphires that are his eyes, and the ruby that is the hilt of his sword) and give them to the poor in the city. In the end, he is melted and the statue is not beautiful without its decorations .

The Swallow

A bird stayed behind when the rest of his block travelled to Egypt in order to court river plant that he had fallen in love with. His friends rejected and thought that this was a foolish decision. The reed eventually decides that she will not go with him. The swallow is angry and he decides to travel to Egypt by himself. However, before he leaves, he tries to sleep one night under the statue of the happy prince the statue begins crying because he is sad of everything that he sees going on in the city, the swallow is the agent of the happy prince’s kindness, bringing the gold to the poor as instructed, and the two become fast friends. In the end, the swallow dies because he chooses to stay with blind prince rather than abandon fly to Egypt, and winter gets too cold. He dies at the feet of statue .

The Reed : The Reed refuses to go with the Swallow, who loves her deeply, and this breaks his heart. She does not want to leave her home, so the Swallow's love ends sadly. Their unlucky love story also shows how people can wrongly judge others by appearance and how gossip and peer pressure can be harmful.

The Town Councilors : They are greedy and obsessed with their public images they cannot understand the humanity of the dead prince and of a little bird for they are too busy with their daily aims to increase their money, rank and power .

The Poor Woman :Her son is sick. She works hard as a seamstress, but she doesn't earn enough money to look after him. One day, she gets the ruby from the prince's sword.

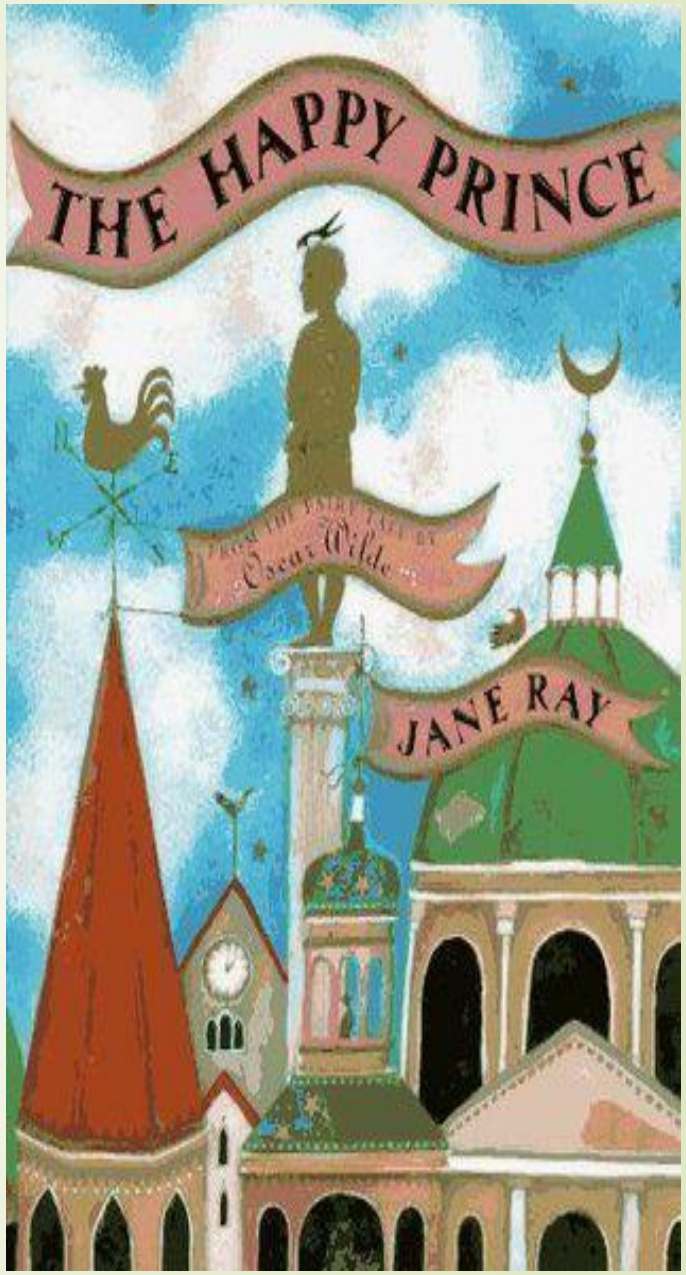
The Young Playwright : He is starving and struggling to complete a play, but he is unable to think because he is so hungry. He receives the frost sapphire eye from the prince.

Little Girl : She drops the matches she was supposed to sell and cries because she knows her father will beat her if she goes home with no matches or money. Then, the prince gives her one of his sapphire eyes.

The Mayor He is a man who cares more about appearances than people. He likes fancy celebrations and beautiful things in the city, but he does not care about poor people. He focuses on making the city look important. This is clear when he agrees to take down the statue of the Happy Prince to use its metal for a statue of himself, without thinking about how much the statue helped the poor.

Setting

The setting of the short story “The Happy Prince” is an unnamed city in the north of Europe, where the statue of a prince stands on a tall column. The statue is an important landmark in the city, as the Swallow notices it right on arrival. When the Prince was alive, he lived in “the Palace of Sans-Souci, where sorrow is not allowed to enter”. The name of the palace could also be symbolic. It is meant to suggest that the Happy Prince lived in a place without concerns, or worries, carefree, isolated from the suffering in the outside world. apart from the symbolic name of the palace.



5. Major themes in The Happy Prince

1. Appearances and Reality:

The prince is dressed in beautiful clothes, and people see him as a symbol of wealth in the city. But later, his fine clothes are gone, and he no longer looks as beautiful as before. Even though he looked happy and perfect from the outside, he was actually very sad inside. In the end, he looks poor and dull, but he feels truly happy. The city also seems beautiful and rich on the outside, but inside it is full of poverty.

2.Selfishness

The happy prince is very selfish. He is concerned only with his needs. When the Swallow in several times explains to the prince the dangerous situation of being late in this place and how wonderful Egypt is there, the prince pays no attention to the bird's needs and condition. The reed is also described as being selfish when the birds mentions that she prefers to be domestic.

3. Love

The concern of the statue for other people and for the swallow shows great sensitive feelings. The prince gives away everything to help people, and the swallow and prince share a fantastic love bond.

4. Sacrifice

The Happy Prince is the only one in the story who thinks wisely and acts in a useful way. He understands that his ruby, sapphires, and gold are more valuable to poor people than to himself. The Happy Prince gives away everything he has, even his eyes, to help others. On the other hand, the Mayor and the Councillors do nothing to help anyone. They only care about their positions and how important they look. Their pride and selfishness stop them from seeing the suffering around them.

Both the Happy Prince and the Swallow make great sacrifices. The Swallow stays with the Prince to help him, even though he knows he should fly to Egypt before winter. Because he stays too long, the cold kills him. This shows how loyal and kind the Swallow is. He could have left many times, but he chose to stay and help the Prince until the end.

The Happy Prince feels deep sadness when he sees the poor people suffer. His sadness makes him more generous and kind. Even though he knows he is losing everything, he continues to help those in need. He always thinks about others before himself, showing how selfless and loving he is. While the Prince gives away his jewels and gold, the little Swallow gives his life to serve others. He never reaches Egypt, but stays with the Prince in the freezing cold until he dies at the Prince’s feet.

5. True Friendship

The prince in the story shares a great bond of friendship and respect with the little swallow. Whatever the prince commands, the swallow follows the orders faithfully. The friendship they had was so true and loyal that they were put in heaven together.

6. Beauty and Morality

The protagonist of “The Happy Prince” is himself a statue meant to decorate the city, and through him, the story explores the relationship between art and usefulness. The first description of the Happy Prince focuses on his artistic beauty: he is “gilded all over with thin leaves of fine gold,”. He has eyes of “two bright sapphires,” and on his sword-hilt “a large red ruby glowed ”.Importantly, Oscar Wilde’s story doesn’t disavow beauty altogether. Instead, it critiques the fixation on outer beauty at the expense of compassion and also rejects the equation of such beauty with innate value, when the Prince readily gives up his beauty.

Symbols

1.The swallow, as seen in the story, has a meeting with its colony in Egypt but it chooses to remain with the prince and to help him fulfill his wishes until the Prince is satisfied. This depicts that the swallow is a symbol for loyalty and friendship.

2.The prince's lead heart is a form of symbol as well. As learned in the story when all the body parts of the happy prince melt, his heart remains attached. The heart cannot be melted because it is made out of lead. In the symbolic context this is to subtly send the message of immortality to the readers which in one way can be viewed as when one sacrifices their own wealth and happiness for others, they become immortal and this is the symbolism behind the lead heart of the prince that does not melt. In conclusion, the lead heart can never be melted because the Prince is forever immortal.

3.The townspeople: They are a symbol of repression. Repression means keeping one's wishes and feelings hidden or pushed out of the mind. This symbol shows how power can be misused and how people can be oppressed. In this story, the writer uses many symbols, and every character has a special meaning. The statue of the Happy Prince represents kindness and sacrifice, like Christ who gave his life for humanity. In the same way, the Happy Prince gives up his beauty to help others. The Swallow also gives his life for the sake of humanity. The woman, the girl, the writer, and the poor boys all represent the poverty of the Victorian age.

4.Egypt

Oscar Wilde uses the word “Egypt” as a symbol of great and silent beauty. The Swallow admires this place because in Egypt the sun is warm, the green palm trees grow, and the crocodiles rest lazily in the mud. It seems that for the Swallow, Egypt is like paradise. Through this, Wilde also shows his deep love for beauty and his strong sense of aesthetics.

5.Title “the Happy Prince”

This story also has symbolic title; the title of the story is “The Happy Prince”, but deeply he is not happy. He feels sad, pity for the common people so, he is not happy as the title suggests.

Satire

Oscar Wilde’s story shows many examples of satire, especially about the education system and social injustice in The Happy Prince. Wilde talks about a professor who was surprised to see a swallow in winter, so he wrote a long letter to the local newspaper. People said that the letter had so many difficult words that no one could understand it. Although Wilde wrote this fairy tale for his son, it is full of satirical characters, situations, and ideas. In this story, Wilde mocks writers who write only to show off their knowledge or to become famous, not because they have something meaningful to say. Their writings are often exaggerated and pointless. Wilde also criticizes those writers who write long and confusing articles, which even they themselves do not fully understand.

Analysis

Oscar Wilde shows the double standard of society: the rich people of the society are in the enjoyment of all luxuries but people are devoid of basic needs. This social injustice is best satirized in the happy prince. The first victim of this injustice is poor seamstress who is in poor conditions and is not able to do something for her child. She is helpless waiting for the time to take its turn. With her hands, she can stitch the gown of queen. Yet with these hands, she cannot cure her child. The writer's state of depression makes our hearts rebel against this unfair distinction and the pleasures of the rich are more valuable than the life of individuals. The second victim we see is the young man in the garret, who had large and dreamy eyes". But the harsh society had snatched the dreams from eyes and stuffed them with gloominess of poverty. He had to complete the play, but his empty belly had molded his creativity towards ideas of poverty. As it is said that "The empty stomach is the grave of great ideas".

In The Happy Prince, the main themes are loyalty, compassion, kindness, struggle, appearance, sacrifice, selflessness, and corruption. The Prince shows these qualities by asking the Swallow to take the gold and jewels from his body to help the poor people in the town. He uses his beauty in a good and useful way. This is important because the reader might think that the Mayor and the Councillors should be the ones helping the citizens, but they do not. This becomes clear when the Mayor wants to replace the statue of the Happy Prince with one of himself. Oscar Wilde is showing that the people in power are selfish. Instead of caring for others, they only think about themselves and ignore the poverty and suffering around them.

The fact that the Happy Prince’s lead heart cannot be broken or melted at the end of the story is very meaningful. It shows his strength, kindness, and goodness. When the Angels take the Swallow and the Prince’s heart to heaven, it gives the story a religious message. Wilde seems to suggest that both the Happy Prince and the Swallow lived the way God wants people to live by being kind, loving, and selfless.

In contrast, the people in power in the town only think about themselves and ignore the poor and needy. The Happy Prince and the Swallow gave everything they had to help others, but no one else did the same. The leaders of the town are shown as selfish and corrupt, while the Prince and the Swallow represent true goodness and generosity.

Even though the town rejects them, God rewards them by taking them to heaven. The story is an allegory that teaches the importance of charity, love, and sacrifice, showing that these qualities can bring us closer to God.

The Moral and Social Message in The Happy Prince

The Happy Prince is a story that gives many important lessons. It shows how some people in society can be cold and unkind, but it also shows the beauty of compassion and love. It is a modern fairy tale with magic, yet it takes place in a real world full of real problems. Oscar Wilde wanted to show both the good and bad sides of human nature in a simple way. He also wanted to criticize a society that has no feelings or sympathy for others.

The main character, the Happy Prince, lived a life of beauty and joy. But after his death, when he saw the sadness and pain of the people in the city, he felt sorry for them and decided to help. With the help of the swallow, he gave away all his gold and jewels to make others happy. Even though he became dull and lost his beauty, he never regretted his actions.

The swallow also showed great kindness and love. He stayed with the Prince and helped him, even though it cost him his own life. In the end, both the Prince and the swallow were rewarded with eternal life because of their goodness.

In the story, the Prince and the swallow stand for kindness and sacrifice, while the rich and powerful people stand for selfishness and ignorance. They only care about themselves and ignore the suffering around them. Oscar Wilde wanted to show the difference between selfishness and selflessness, and he made this clear when God rewarded the two kind characters for their good deeds.

The story uses simple language, but every sentence carries a deep meaning. Wilde guides the reader through the events and messages with care. That’s why The Happy Prince should be read closely, as it teaches strong lessons about love, kindness, and humanity.

The main moral of the story is that true happiness comes from helping others. It reminds us that love, kindness, and sacrifice are more valuable than wealth or beauty. Both the Prince and the swallow prove that real goodness means caring for others before ourselves. Oscar Wilde wanted readers to learn that a kind heart is worth more than a rich life.